

First Homily on the Mass: “Why the Mass is boring”

A friend of mine gave a talk a few years ago on the Mass, at the University of St. Thomas. And he called the talk: “**Why is the Mass boring.**” I like this title, because this is one of the most common complaints of Catholics about the Mass. Among those who feel this way, there are many who blame their dull experience entirely on the Mass itself--thinking it out of touch with the real world, with life itself, something surely concocted by a few old fuddy-duddies that needs jazzing up a bit--“we need to make it more entertaining and exciting”--they say.

But let's be honest, there is some truth to this complaint, for on the surface of things the Mass is set up to be boring: the same gestures and rituals (the sign of the cross, genuflecting, kneeling, standing, our responses to the prayers), the same familiar structure is followed each time from the opening to the closing, and the readings repeat themselves from year to year. So on the surface of things, as with anything repetitive and familiar, it is easy to see how the Mass can easily become boring. But this is precisely the problem and the challenge: how to keep ourselves from floating up to the surface where the Mass easily becomes mere external, mechanical observance. And if we find ourselves there, how can we break through the surface, plunging once again into the deep mystery of the Mass, reconnecting ourselves to God's real presence and become deeply engaged in what God is doing? The simple answer is: **Faith**--it is by the gift of faith, a living faith working together with love, that we break through the surface--and for this we must constantly pray. Over the next several weeks we will be talking about this important role of faith and how to exercise it in Mass.

There are many things we may find boring in life--even important things--but if we take a closer look at when we feel bored, we will find that one of the reasons for our boredom is that we are not interiorly engaged in what bores us. For example:

- Elementary school piano recitals. After hearing 10 different versions of “Twinkle, Twinkle . . .” one can be bored to tears. But it's not boring for the kids who are playing--nor for their parents who are engaged through their love.
- Watching little league baseball--a very slow going game. Yet not boring for the kids that are participating in the game, nor for some of the parents who through their love are very emotionally engaged and involved in the game, cheering on their son or daughter. They may be sitting in the bleachers, but their hearts are right there with their kids.
- Adult conversation is often boring for children--yet not boring for them when they are older and able to engage in it themselves.

I have a nephew who is an actor, and I went down to see one of his plays in LaCrosse, WI. And it was very interesting how they set things up: the actors were often situated up in the seats, which made us feel that we were part of the play, that the whole theater was a stage. Its hard to become bored when you become part of the action, the drama. My dear friends, this is one of the keys to understanding the Mass: for in the Mass there is no such thing as an ‘audience’--it is not intended for spectators--if we come with this

mindset the Mass is guaranteed to bore us. In the Mass we are all called to be participants, to take an active part in a real drama--not imaginary like a play--for each Mass is a privileged and precise moment of worship where the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, His passion, death and resurrection, is not only remembered, but becomes really present for us to take part in it.

- This is why preparation before Mass is so important. Actors don't come right from the coffee shop and jump right on stage and begin acting. No, there's preparation: they have to go over their lines, ponder them and take them in, etc... If this is true for acting and many other things in life, how much more for the most important thing we do in life: the Mass.

We all remember the parable of the **treasure hidden in a field**, what is not mentioned to us is how many days and even years the man walked by or over that treasure just a few feet under the surface, not knowing it was there, not realizing how special this field was. But when he discovers it, his life is changed forever. What if there is indeed a treasure hidden in every Mass, a treasure that many have not yet discovered, and perhaps they have never met someone who was able to guide them to it.

When a person finds the hidden treasure of the Mass, and responds to it with faith and love, their experience of Mass will never be the same--and how many times we have seen this with both young and old. It can happen to any cradle Catholic, going to Mass for years out of duty and obligation, maybe out of guilt or afraid of what people might think if they didn't go. And then one day something happens which changes their view of the Mass. On the surface it is still the same boring Mass, but within them something has changed--they have discovered 'the treasure' that lies hidden in the Mass: Jesus Christ, and the transforming power of His paschal Mystery. For joy of this discovery they come freely and gladly, and actually look forward to coming--they do not want to miss a single Mass. They no longer need a Commandment to tell them that Mass is how Catholics keep and honor the Sabbath. Love for Christ spurs them on. Some even come during the week if they can, when it is not at all obligatory. Have these people gone crazy? Have they stopped taking their meds? Don't they know that the Mass is boring? No, no longer for them--their faith has touched 'the treasure' of the Mass--and it has awakened their faith.

Blessed J.P. II once said: "In one little, round, white, consecrated host is the solution / answer to all the worlds problems." He could only say this because he himself was a man of faith, deeply connected to God's real presence in the Eucharist, and deeply engaged in God's action in the Mass.

It is when I discovered this treasure in the Mass, as a Protestant, at the age of 20, that I became Catholic. At this moment I knew that the Catholic Church was my home forever. How could I leave the Lord, so powerfully present to me in the Eucharist? How could I break his heart by missing a single Mass, when He suffered so much to make it possible for me to receive the gift of His Body and Blood in Holy Communion? And in the 30 years of being Catholic I have heard some of the most boring homilies (and I'm sure I've given a few myself), and endured some pretty awful music (thank God we do

not have that problem here). I have worshipped in many Churches, and some of them very ugly Churches. But it is not in these things that I have thrown my anchor, for they constantly change and vary from Church to Church--sometimes they are good, sometimes bad. No, it is Jesus Christ and his Paschal Mystery which draws me to Mass and dictates how I prepare and take part in the Mass.

This is what this whole year will be about. May God bless all of us the with a greater, living faith so that we may be fully present to His presence in the Mass and deeply engaged in what He is doing. In this way, the Mass will bear much fruit in our lives, in our families, and in our parish and community.

A friend of mine gave a talk a few years ago on the Mass at the University of St. Thomas. And he called the talk: Why is the Mass so boring? I like this title, because this is one of the most common complaints of Catholics. Among those who feel this way, there are many who blame their dull experience entirely on the Mass itself-- thinking it out of touch with the real world, with life itself, something surely concocted by a few old fuddy-duddies that needs jazzing up a bit to suit their sensibilities--we need to make it more entertaining and exciting.

- There are some things in the Mass that can change, like the music for example, but the basic structure and content cannot.

Importance of faith for the Mass - but not as a feeling. We need to take care of it, nourish it, fan it, feed it. Otherwise it dies.

What happens if I experience the Mass as boring? Well, if I am a good Christian and trying to live my faith, I may think that there is something wrong with my faith--yet the fact that I may 'feel' bored need not keep me from participating by faith in Mass.

For some who think the Mass is boring, they blame it entirely on the Mass, that it is out of touch with the real world, something put together by some old fuddy-duddies, which needs Jazzing up a bit.

So now let us take the Mass. In one sense the Mass is set up to be boring: the same rituals, the same familiar structure each time, and the readings repeat themselves from year to year. On the surface it is easy for the Mass to become boring. But that's precisely the problem and challenge: we need to break through the surface to connect with how God is present and how God is working in the Mass--and to become deeply engaged in what is happening.

If we see ourselves at Mass as one of the crowd we will be bored most of the time, for crowds come to be spectators, to be entertained. But what if the Mass was more like a drama within no seating, where every one who comes is on stage and part of the play-- a drama where there are no spectators, only actors / participants. No one has ever been bored while acting in a play, when they become part of the action and drama. Yet, this is exactly what the Mass is: it is a privileged and precise moment of worship where the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ is not only remembered, but becomes present for us to take part in.

To participate: we participate in silence, when we respond to the prayers, when we sing the scriptures.

Key to the Mass - The Treasure discovered in a field. People can walk through and by that field hundreds of times, and yet not realize what is buried just a few inches or feet below the surface. If they knew, they we appreciate that field much differently. What if we were to discover a treasure at Mass, a treasure that is here in every Mass, but we just didn't know it, have not yet discovered it. Why would someone want to go to Mass every Sunday? Even more, why would someone want to go to Mass every day? Why would so many people want to spend an hour praying before the Blessed Sacrament. Yet how do we explain the change in so many people, who for years could hardly stand going to Mass, and suddenly they freely desire to go every day, who pray hours before the blessed Sacrament, come early to Mass and stay after. The Mass did not change, all the familiar repetitive gestures, prayers, and rituals remain (and that's the temptation--to think that the problem is the Mass and try to change it to suite our tastes), but something has changed in the hearts of these people. They have discovered something, their faith has touched something--something has touched their faith, and they experience the Mass differently.

“Lord Jesus, at that moment when you gave me the gift of faith to believe in your true presence in the Eucharist, I knew deeply in my heart that I was home forever--that I could never leave you. I will put up with boring homilies, I will endure poor music, I will come and worship and visit you where ever you are, even in the ugly churches that house you. How can I leave you, you who suffered and died on the Cross to give me this gift of your Body and Blood in Holy Communion. How can I not come to Mass, when you become present and give yourself with so much love? How can my heart not melt with love, how can my heart not be pierced with sorrow for all the ways I have not shown you the proper love and reverence in the Blessed Sacrament?”

Endured hokey hymns and happy-clappy music

Many people go away empty from Mass because they did not come properly prepared or disposed.